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US KIDS

VERSES · BY
COURTNEY · RYLEY · COOPER ·

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US KIDS

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By Courtney Ryley Cooper
Us Kids

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TO ETHEL.

This is just a book of nonsense,
  Just a little book of verse.
I'm sure it could be better—
  (You've said it might be worse),
And for those words of kindness,
  For that indulgent view,
May I be bold and dedicate
  This little book to you?

—Courtney Ryley Cooper.

AND NOW—

-CHAPIN-

L'ENTRE.

Just a sackful of crawdads, a collarless shirt,
Just a towhead of closely clipped hair,
Just a small pair of hands, rough, covered with dirt,
Just some freckles—two feet that were bare.
Ah, the visions I saw. And always, it seemed,
I would live in that childhood of joy;
With my fairy tale thoughts, with the hopes that I dreamed,
But, you see, I was only a boy.

E'en in school I was good, just as good as could be,
Why, always my lessons I learned;
And I'd wait after hours, just so I might see
Once more her for whom my heart yearned.
She was pretty and fair, not too timid—nor bold,
How I struggled to keep my love hid.
For she was my teacher, quite thirty years old,
While I—I was only a kid.

— CHAPIN —

THE TEMPTATION.

Plowin' th' forty, it's harder'n rock,
Flies is just thicker'n sin.
There's dust in my throat an' clods in my sock,
Don't see how they ever got in.
Th' kids in th' road is a-startin' somewhere,
Gee whiz, look at Jimmie McKee—
They're goin' a-swimmin' 'cause Bill over there
Is wigglin' two fingers at me.

Aw g'wan, come haw! Ain't you got enny sense?
Run into th' stump then, you fool!
Never saw nothin' that'd ever commence
To be half as dumb as a mule.
Still ten acres left—o' course they're th' worst,
An' me just a-dyin' to be
A-slidin' th' slides, or divin' head first—
Bill's wigglin' them fingers at me.

There's Paw comin' 'long, wonder now if he might
Let me go if I got awful sick?
Bet your boots just as soon as I got outa sight
I'd begin gettin' well mighty quick.
I'll groan a whole lot an' get all doubled up;
I b'lieve he's beginnin' to see,
So I'll just look as sick as a bad pisoned pup—
Them fingers do wonders with me!

CARRYIN' IN TH' WOOD.

I kin hear Bill Jenkins whistle, jus' a-signalin' to me
To go out paw-paw huntin' or to climb th' 'simmon tree,
Or play th' games th' other kids is playin' down th' road,
But, gee, I'm workin'—I can't come, I'm packin' in this load
O' heavy kindlin' I jus' cut, O-o-o-o-o, gosh, I wish I could,
But I kin hear Maw callin: "Jim, you carryin' in that wood?"

All through th' week I pester Maw an' ask to get away
With all th' other kids I know, gee whiz! I wanta play
So bad my mouth jus' waters when I hear 'em laugh an' shout;
But I allus gotta mend th' stile, or turn th' horses out,
Or paint th' fence or milk th' cow or fix th' buggy hood,
An' when all o' that is over, why, I gotta chop th' wood.

— CHAPIN —

An' Maw don't smile th' least bit when I ast her if I may
Go out fer jus' an hour or two, it's "wait 'til Saturday."
An' then, when Saturday comes round, she finds a new excuse
To keep me in, th' pigs is out or else th' calves is loose.
Then she'll promise me a dime 'r two—some day if I'll be good,
But all so far I've ever got is carryin' in th' wood.

Th' kids is still a whistlin', Tommy's beckonin' to me,
Maw's way down by th' spring house, huh, I wonder if she'll see
My coat tails as I'm runnin'. Gee, I'm goin'! Bet she'll tear
Th' hide clean offen me tonight, sure'n ennything she'll wear
Th' buggy whip out on me, but supposin' that she should—
A lickin's whole lot better'n carryin' in th' wood.

TH' SLIPP'RY ELM TREE.

Out over th' fence, by th' pasture pond,
Where th' cows is drinkin', then way beyond;
Shin under th' hedge to th' timothy patch
An' cut 'way across; lift th' big gate's latch,
Then down th' long road to th' timber line—
(In there with th' leaves an' th' breeze it's fine)—
Have a mighty good time along with me;
I'm goin' down to th' slipp'ry elm tree.

Pick a bunch o' wild grapes along th' road,
Shy rocks at th' croak of a big tree toad
Kerslam! down th' hill an' wade in th' crick,
An' look at th' place where th' mare got sick.
Then see if there's eggs in th' ol' crow's nest,
An' stretch straight out for a good, long rest—
If I turn my head just a bit, I'll see
Th' piece I'll pull offen th' slipp'ry elm tree.

Some'll go in my pocket, a piece or two,
I'll lay to one side just to have to chew
When I'm goin' back home, don't guess it'll hurt

- CHAPIN -

If I stick some chunks in my gingham shirt—
It's fun a-fishin' or shootin' squirrels
Or playin' postoffice, an' kissin' girls,
But still, all th' same, I'd just as soon be
Scrapin' th' bark from th' slipp'ry elm tree!

DAY DREAMS.

It's funny how th' giants an' th' dwarfs an' other
things,
An' great big dragons gushin' smoke from out their
nose in rings,
Kin always be so gentle when they're plastered on
a page,
In some kind of a fairy tale—no matter how they
rage—
They just can't jump er bite you, they've gotta stay
an' look
Jus' mean an' cross an' fussy when they're in a fairy
book.

My Mommer's allus telling me about th' things
they do,
About th' little girls they eat an' boys they bite in
two—

How giants live in drefful caves, with dragons all about—
(Mom says that once you're in there, you never can get out),
Then she tells me 'bout th' Doo-dad an' the Spectical igoox—
But, gee, those things don't scare me' cause they only live in books.

I wish that I could meet a great big dragon er an elf,
Er a Bogie man that's just so mean he nearly scares hisself.
I'd get a great big fairy book an' open it up wide,
An' sneak up close an' shut it, so th' dragon'd be inside,
I wouldn't scare a teenty bit, at howls er growls er wails;
I'd know he'd have to stay right in that book o' fairy tales!

PUZZLE
CHAPIN

THE ROSE IS RED—

I got a girl named Susie,
  An' I've bought her a Valentine,
With reg'lar lace an' th' fixin's,
  Cost a mighty big lot—a dime.

She lives in th' house down yonder,
  With th' big green window blines,
There's just a whole bunch o' fellers
  That's a-sending her Valentines.

But I know that mine's lot's better
  Than those Jim er Eddie er Pearl
Is sendin', so I've just marked it:
  "From your very best sweetheart, Earl."

THE AFTERMATH.

If I could only sneak inside,
  An' hurry up th' stairs,
I'd even pass th' bogie place
  An' wouldn't mind the bears.
But Mommer's waitin' 'hind th' door—
  Jus' tapped me on th' head
An' said I'd have t' wash my feet
  Afore I come to bed.

Gee whiz! Why, I've been swimmin' twice
  An' wadin' in th' slew,
An' what's th' use o' cleanin' up
  All day an' night time too.
'Sides that, nobody'll see me,
  I told Ma that; she said
Real cold an' calm an' solemn like:
  "Then you don't come to bed."

— CHAPIN —

Oh, I'm so just all-fired sleepy,
I hardly see th' moon,
It's bigger'n blazes too at that,
Be sky high purty soon.
Guess I've gotta go an' do it,
Gosh, my toe's all sor'n red,
It'll hurt like fire to scrub it now.
Afore I go to bed.

O-o-o-o-o! That cistern water's shiv'ry,
Th' goose-bumps everywhere
Is bustin' out all over me,
They're even in my hair.
Whew, that ol' lye soap's a-stingin',
I'd just as soon be dead,
As have to wash my feet this way
Afore I go to bed.

WHEN I GROW UP.

Guess I'll be a pirate when I get grown
An' sail aroun' an' do a lot o' things.
An' I'll have a fortune all my own,
With piles o' gold an' diamond studded rings.

Guess I'll be a miner an' dig for coal,
An' have a little lantern on my hat.
Still I wouldn't have much when I got old—
No, siree, you won't catch me doin' that!

Guess I'll be a robber an' wear a gun,
Nobody'd ever catch me when I hid.
Don't like that idea, allus on th' run,
Be a mighty lonesome feller if I did.

Guess I'll stick to farmin', right here at home,
A-startin' when th' crows begin to caw
To workin' in th' wheat field, an' not roam,
An' be an ordinary man like Paw.

- CHAPIN -

WHEN THE NEXT TIME COMES.

Played hookey today, had a mighty good time,
Played hookey today an' th' water was fine.
Got all tangled up in an ol' hook an' line
An' a big jagged rock bumped that sore toe o' mine,
Played hookey today.

Played hookey today, Maw looked at my hair
An' wondered what made all that dampness up there,
An' I told her I'd sweated from chasin' th' mare
In th' pasture. I lied, but then I didn't care,
Played hookey today.

Played hookey today, then went to th' shed
Where Maw spanked me good an' sent me to bed,
Said I'd been a bad boy, that's just what she said,
Next time I go swimmin', I won't wet my head,
Played hookey today.

IN THE FALL.

Just a quail er so a-pipin' an' "Bob Whitin'" down
th' lane,
Just a rustlin' o' th' breezes in th' field o' sugar cane,
Just some barkin' squirrels a-hoppin' 'bout th'
branches o' th' trees,
Or a-hidin' in th' fadin', slowly colorin' autumn
leaves—
Every ray o' sunshine's happiness, each drop o'
dew's a jewel;
But, gosh, I can't enjoy 'em 'cause I've gotta go to
school!

Th' school-house road's all dusty, 'bove th' sumac
bushes red
I kin hear a turtle dove er two a-cooin' overhead;
In th' kaffir fields th' blackbirds is a-chatterin' busily
As they're gobblin' up th' kernels—Oh, gee whiz,
it seems to me
That when everything gets pretty, when th'
weather's crisp an' cool,
That bottom just drops out o' things—I've gotta go
to school.

·CHAPIN ·

Then' th' air's so soft an hazy; seems a kinda filmy veil
That's a-shieldin' th' unpleasant things, while down there in th' dale
Th' goldenrod's all bloomin', why its yellow blossoms spread
A sorta halo all around, an' rays from overhead
Of a mornin' sun that's beamin' makes me stubborn as a mule
To think I've gotta give it up an' trudge along to school.

Huh, I wonder who that is I see, a-hurryin' down th' road,
She must be late er sompin', an' just looky at th' load
O' heavy books she's luggin', well, who is she anyway?
Oh, gee golly, it's Matildy, an' we fussed just yesterday.
Still, she's smilin', so forgivin'—(guess I acted like a fool;
I wonder ef she'd let me tote her books along to school).

THRESHIN' TIME.

There's blisters on my hands an' there's blisters on my feet,
Life ain't no doggoned picnic when you're out a-pitchin' wheat,
When th' merc'ry's bustin' up an' th' sun's a-bustin' down,
An' th' wheat's a pilin' up just everywhere around.

Derned ol' thresher's spittin' straw an' th' engine's spittin' fire
An' th' dinged ol' waggin driver piles th' shocks up higher'n higher.
No, sir, ain't a thing to life 'cept just tarnation complete—
I'd rather be a measly pup than out a-pitchin' wheat.

CHAPIN

WHEN THE PREACHER CAME.

Had chicken today 'cause th' preacher was there,
An' so was th' schoolma'am an' Billy O'Hare,
An' a whole lot o' others, dad said to me: "Heck,
When it comes round your turn, you jus' ask fer
th' neck."

Had chicken today an' we started to eat,
(When I'd gotten my chair off th' preacher's big
feet.)
An' I got het up; passed my plate 'fore th' rest—
Forgot what Dad told me an' asked for th' breast!

Well, Maw looked at me an' went straight in th' air,
While Paw's face got purple an' Billy O'Hare
Spilled gravy all down his new pink an' white shirt—
Then I got a lickin', Law Sakes, but it hurt!

If there's chicken again, you just bet I won't care
If th' preacher er schoolma'am or who all is there—
When Dad stops his carvin' an' says to me: "Heck."
I'll jus' start a shoutin': "Dad, gimme th' neck!"

THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

Deer Santa Claus, if you'll bring me a sled,
Or a big train o' cars (or a shotgun instead),
An' a new pair o' boots an' a fine set o' skates
An' some oranges an' candy an' all stuck up dates,
Then a real leather saddle, a bridle to boot—
Guess I'll need a tin horn for a big Christmas toot—
You might bring me a harp an' a ik-cordee-an
An' a drum—so I'll grow up to be in th' band—
Then I want a new hat an' a new hickory shirt—
Th' one I got las' year's just all over dirt.
Say, I need a new baseball, a glove an' a bat,
Whatever you do, please now, don't forget that!
Oh, yes, sompin else, got some rattlin' bones
Like they had in th' show? Well, that's all—Johnny
Jones.

P. S. Never mind about bringin' that sled,
Mebbe Billy Clarke needs it, you know he's sick in bed.
An' th' cars an' th' shotgun an' saddle an' things—
Guess you better just take them to poor Jimmy King's.
Why, he ain't had a Christmas since I don't know when;
They're poorer'n a churchmouse, an' after that, then
Just sneak round to Blakes with th' harp an' th' drum,
An' the ik-cordee-an; Pete'd make th' house hum,
He'd just be so tickled. Th' hickory shirt?
'Twouldn't fit me as well as it would Charley Burt,
An' say, Willie Toll needs a baseball an' bat
An' a glove an' a pony; forgot all about that.
Guess all that I want is them rattlin' bones,
An' some candy an' stuff, an' th' dates—Johnny Jones.

- CHAPIN -

FISHIN'

Well, what's th' matter anyhow,
  Doggone it all, what's wrong?
I haven't had a nibble,
  Been a-fishin' awful long.
Ain't even been a ripple
  Round th' cork, now that ain't right
Fer me to be so patient an'
  Not get a single bite.

This crick's jus' full o' sunfish,
  Must a-gotten mighty wise,
Th' way they've been a-shyin',
  Guess I'll have ter tell some lies
About jus' how th' line broke
  When I almos' caught a whale.
(Seems awful fer a country kid
  Ter tell a city tale.)

Never saw a cork so still like,
  Hasn't moved a single time,
Since I came sneakin' up here
  An' loosened up my line.
Perhaps th' worm ain't wigglin',
  Guess I'd better take a look—
Well, if that don't beat all Hemlock;
  I fergot to bait th' hook!

THE WATERLOO.

Walkin' home with Mamie, jus' wanderin' sorta slow,
Walkin' home with Mamie, not carin' where we go;
Stutterin' kinda sometimes, hones' can yuh blame me,
Fer gettin' sorta fussed up, a-walkin' home with Mamie?

Golly, but she's pretty, lips so soft an' full an' red,
To me her yeller pigtails is braids o' gold instead,
Nose a wee bit freckled, cheeks so pink an' flamey,
Life's sure mighty ticklish, a-walkin' home with Mamie.

Walkin' home with Mamie, an' my heart's a-beatin' fast.
I could see her always, an' still love her to th' last.
Gosh, I'm goin'ter kiss her, O-o-o-o-o-o, she called me **Jamie!**
I'm jus' bubblin' with affection, a-walkin' home with **Mamie.**

CHAPIN

Lordy, but my face hurts, an' my cheeks is redder'n
sin,
My right ear's jus' nigh tore off, my mouth is all
caved in.
Yep, I tried to kiss her, Wow, she did b'lay me!
Never catch me 'nother time, a-walkin' home with
Mamie!

WHEN YOU'RE WEARIN' SUNDAY CLOTHES.

Th' bumble bees is bumblin' an' a-buzzin' 'round th' nest
That's just outside th' picket fence, an' gee! it's just th' best
Ol' fun to fight like blazes, just to keep from bein' stung—
Er juggin' 'em an' hear 'em buzz an' then go down—ker-chung!
But I ain't out a-fightin', neither's Bill er Jake er Mose—
Huh, gotta go to meetin' an' we're wearin' Sunday clothes.

Th' pears is just a rustlin' on th' branches o' th' trees,
An' th' smell o' ripenin' apples comes floatin' on th' breeze,
With th' cooin' of th' turtle doves below th' swimmin' pool
Where it's nice an' still an' shady an' th' water's good an' cool;
Doggone it all, we just can't budge! It's awful, goodness knows,
To have to stay in just because you're wearin' Sunday clothes.

- CHAPIN -

My pore ol' feet is burnin' an' my face is redder'n
fire'n'
This dinged ol' collar's chokin' me, my cricky; bet
it's higher'n
Th' tower o' th' church house where we gotta go
today,
An' these pants! I just can't move in 'em. I
wonder anyway
Why folkses want to frill me up with stuff an' fur-
belows—
Gosh, life just ain't worth livin' when you're wearin'
Sunday clothes!

POWDER
— CHAPIN —

FIRECRACKERS.

Wisht I knew just what was in 'em,
  What makes 'em bang that way,
When th' fizzlin' string's all burnt up
  An' th' noise begins to play.
Firecrackers sure is funny,
  Some is red an' some is green—
Outside, 'cause all that poppin' part
  Is where it can't be seen.

One time I got a big un an'
  I held it in my hand,
So I c'd look real close-like when
  Th' poppin' part began.
Then th' doctor came to see me,
  You betcher life I cried,
'Cause it's got an awful temper—
  That poppin' part inside.

SPOOKS.

Come, climb on my knee and I'll tell you a yarn
Of the creepy old things that hide in the barn;
It's all about ghosts, hobgoblins and spooks
That lurk in the corners, the crannies and nooks,
To reach out and grab, just as you're passing by,
Not a bit do they care if you whimper and cry,
For they're skinny and scrawny and terribly clad—
They're just there to catch little boys who are bad.

Then the spookses will carry you far, far away,
To a cave in the mountains and there you must stay
'Til at night when it's dark, uncanny and cold,
Then the goblins 'll come to that cavern so old;
They'll lop off your ears an' they'll cut off your nose,
They'll singe off your eyebrows and chop off your toes,
They'll slice off your fingers and pull out your hair—
You may cry all you want but the goblins won't care.

No more will you sleep in your own trundle bed,
For the goblins will watch you to chop off your head
If you try to escape to your babyhood joys—
You must stay—'tis the fate of all bad little boys.
What! Is my Bobby crying? Is my Bobby sad?
Is my Bobby sorry he's ever been bad?
Well, there, there, there, Bobby! Now don't you
feel blue—
For of all this wild story not one word is true.

TH' SWIMMIN' POOL.

I know a place where I like to go,
I know a place where it's cool,
I know a place where the breezes blow—
Down at th' swimmin' pool.

Over th' water th' shade is deep,
Like to play hookey from school,
An' jus' sneak away, skin off an' then leap
Into th' swimmin' pool.

Up on th' bank is a slippery slide,
Crick sparkles jus' like a jewel.
(Learned jus' last week to swim on my side,
Down in th' swimmin' pool.)

I know th' place, wanta come with me?
Jump up behin' on th' mule,
I'll kick him a bit, in a minnit we'll be
Down in th' swimmin' pool.

– CHAPIN –

WHEN MOMMER'S SICK IN BED.

Th' house is awful quiet, an' it's kinda lonesome too,
I've been stayin' round all mornin', there ain't a thing to do;
I've gotta walk on tiptoe, that's what th' doctor said,
An' not go 'way ner nothin', cause my mommer's sick in bed.

It's a great ol' day fer fishin', bet th' perch down in th' crick
Is bitin' just ferocious, get a lineful mighty quick,
An' then I c'd go a-swimmin', Mom wouldn't see my head,
An' she'd never know I'd been there,—she's awful sick in bed.

I wonder ef she'd miss me, an' when I'd come sneakin' in,
Just plumb tired out from swimmin' an' dirtier'n sin,
I'd go upstairs an' find her, all pale an' white an' dead—
Just as like as not to happen, 'cause she's clean down sick in bed.

-CHAPIN -

No, I guess I'll wash th' dishes an' clean things up
right slick,
I ain't never had much practice, but I'll catch on
real quick,
Then I'll take her up some apples, all juicy-like
an' red,
'Cause Mommer'd 'preciate it an' besides, she's sick
in bed.

SPEAKIN' TIME.

I know my face is dirty, there's a spot right on my nose,
An' how my knees is quakin'! May's lookin' at my toes.
My feet won't stay together, my pants has lost their crease,
I'm mighty derned uncomf'able—I've gotta speak a piece.

Th' boy stood on th' burnin'—doggone it, now I'm stuck.
I don't know ef he stayed there, or ef he run amuck.
Oh, yes, I think I've got it, what word rhymes with perlice?
I wisht I'd never went to school er had to speak a piece!

CHAPIN

Course Ol' Bill is laffin', he never had to wear
A shirt with ruffles on it, er had to comb his hair.
I'll black his eyes termorrer, make his face swell up
like yeas'—
I jus' won't stand fer joshin' when I've gotta speak
a piece.

NEXT WEEK.

Aw, 'course, yuh beat me runnin',
  Think you're mighty smart an' pert,
But yuh never would have did it
  IF
  My kneecap wasn't hurt.

An' then yuh beat me jumpin';
  Well, it wasn't your fault though,
Cause I'd a-skinned you plenty,
  BUT
  A thorn was in my toe.

Aw, yuh needn't get so fussy,
  Cause yuh saw that bird so high;
I couldn't look at all then
  'CAUSE
  A bug got in my eye.

But yuh jus' wait, Ol' Smarty,
  Jus' wait a week an' then,
I'll fix yuh good an' proper
  WHEN
  I git all right again.

- CHAPIN -

THE LOP-EARED PUP.

He was allus first up in th' mornin',
  An' a tuggin' an' barkin' at me,
To open my eyes an' be dressin'—
  There wasn't a time that I'd be
More'n a couple er two er three minutes—
  Then a biscuit an' mebbe a sup
O' coffee an' we'd be together,
  Jus' me an' my lop-eared pup.

Through th' woods an' th' fields we'd wander,
  By th' lanky rail fence we'd run.
As it stretched like a big caterpillar
  A-layin' asleep in th' sun.
All a-sudden, he'd start out a-yelpin',
  As a scurryin' rabbit jumped up—
There wasn't nobody else needed
  'Sides me an' th' lop-eared pup.

I wonder if dogs go to heaven?
  I jus' hope to goodness they do.
'Cause I don't want ever to be there
  If he can't come up with me too.
Th' whole house seems lonesome an' weepy,
  What's that thing that jus' dropped in my cup?
Golly, I guess I—I'm really a-cryin'—
  I shore miss my lop-eared pup.

CHAPIN

— CHAPIN —

AFTER SCHOOL.

Th' leaves is jus' a peepin'; Spring's right at her
level best,
My pore ol' heart's a thumpin', 'way down under-
neath my vest,
Breezes float in at th' window, a rufflin' up my hair;
They make me wanta go an' lick them fellers over
there
That's fixin' up their tackle, startin' to th' fishin'
pool,
An' a-makin' fun o' me fer bein' kept in after school!

I guess I've wrote: "I won't be bad" a hundred mil-
lion times,
But still that dad-binged teacher ain't a showin'
enny signs
O' lettin' up a single bit; by cricky, but I'm mad!
To see those fellers startin' fer th' best time ever had
While I sit in here a-writin': "A bad boy is but a
fool."
Aw, what's th' use o' tryin'—when you're kept in
after school?

RETROSPECT.

Just a bit of blue gingham, torn here and there,
Two shoes that are scuffed at the toes,
A box of toy blocks, dented deep from the wear
Of a nursery's days and the blows
Of tumbled down castles—a dirty paged book
Marred by prints of a candy stained thumb;
A picture or two, a toy dog, its look
Is of sorrow, toy sorrow, and dumb.

It is dusty in there, heavy cobwebs, neglect,
Fast are wearing bright colors away,
And the little lead army, once gaily bedecked,
Now shows in a costume of gray.
The fire engine too is inert on the floor,
Its red turning brown from the rust.
But as years catch the lock more fast in the door,
Still those toys remain true to their trust.

— CHAPIN —

For there day after day this valiant toy band,
  True as gold will abide to the last,
Awaiting the touch of a babyish hand
  That they knew in the days of the past—
Can they know, these poor things, all rusty and dim?
  What would they think should they learn?
As they staunchly wait for the bright sight of him—
  That their master will never return?

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